

Jane Cable

...By...
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CHAPTER XIV.

ABLE saw Bansemmer leave the house as he drove up to the curb in front. The lawyer did not look back, but turned the nearest corner as if eager to disappear from sight as quickly as possible.

Closing the door of his smoking room behind him, David Cable dropped wearily into a chair without removing his hat or coat. His blood was running cold through his veins, his jaw was set and his eyes had the appearance of one who has been dazed by a blow. For many minutes he sat and stared at the andirons in the ember lit grate. From time to time he swallowed painfully and his jaw twitched. Things began growing black and green before his eyes. He started up, with an oath.

He was consumed by the fires of jealousy and suspicion. The doubt that had found lodging in his mind so recently now became a cruel certainty. Into his grim heart sprang the rage of the man who finds himself deceived, despised, dishonored. He was seeing with his own eyes, no doubt, just what others had seen for months—had seen and had pitied or scorned him as the unfortunate dupe. With the thought of it he actually ground his teeth; tears of rage and mortification sprang to his eyes. He recalled his own feelings in instances where shame had fallen upon other men; he recalled his own easy indifference and the temptation to laugh at the plight of the poor devils. It had never entered his mind that some day he might be the object of like consideration in others more or less fortunate, according to their friends.

By the time dinner was announced he had succeeded in restoring himself to a state of comparative calmness. He did not dress for dinner, as was his custom, nor did he stop to ask Frances Cable if she were ready to go down. He heard Jane playing the piano as he descended. She nodded to him, but did not stop, and he paused near the fireplace to look at her strangely. Somewhere back in his brain there was struggling, unknown to him, the old time thought that this child bore him no likeness whatsoever. He only knew he was crushing down the fear that evil or slander or pain might come to her if he were rash, yet just. He was wondering if he could face his wife without betraying himself.

Jane played softly, listlessly. She, on the other hand, was wondering what Graydon would think or say if she spoke to him of what she had seen. She wondered if he would blame her mother as she was beginning to blame his father.

"Mother won't be down to dinner," she finally said.

"Is she ill?" he asked after a moment.

"She is lying down. Margaret will take some tea up to her."

Father and daughter had but little to say to each other during the meal. Their efforts at conversation were perfunctory, commonplace, an unusual state of affairs, of which neither took notice.

"You look tired, father. Has it been a hard day?"

"A rather trying one, Jane. We're having some trouble with the blizzards out west. Trying up everything that we are rushing to the Philippines."

"Is it settled that you are to be made president?"

"It looks like it." There followed a long silence. "By the way, I have good news for you. Mr. Clegg told me today that they are going to take Graydon into the firm. Isn't it great? Really, it is quite remarkable. You are not the only person, it seems, who thinks a lot of that boy."

"A partner? Really? Oh, isn't it glorious? I knew he could—I told him he'd be a partner before long." She waited a moment and then added, "His father was here today for a cup of tea." Cable caught the slightly altered tone and looked up. She was smiling with her fork, palpably preoccupied.

"I'm—I'm sorry I missed him," said he, watching her closely.

"You like him very much, don't you, father?"

"Certainly, and I'm sure your mother does." The fork shook in her fingers and then dropped upon the plate. She looked up in confusion. Cable's eyes were bent upon her intently, and she had never seen so queer a light in them. Scarcely more than the fraction of a second passed before he lowered his gaze, but the mysterious telegraphy of the mind had shot the message of comprehension from one to the other. He saw with horror that the girl at least suspected the true situation. A moment later he arose abruptly and announced that he would run up to see her mother before settling down to some important work in his den.

"Graydon is coming over tonight,"

she said. "We'll be very quiet and try not to disturb you. Don't work too hard, daddy dear."

Upstairs Frances Cable was battling with herself in supreme despair. Confession was on her lips a dozen times, but courage failed her. When she heard his footsteps in the hallway she was ready to cry out the truth to him and end the suspense. As he opened the door to enter the spirit of fairness turned frail and fled before the appeal of prostration. "Wait, wait, wait!" cried the powerful weakness in her heart, and it conquered. She could not tell him then. Tomorrow—the next day, yes, but not then. It was too much to demand of herself, after all.

He came in, but left a few minutes later. She was strangely unresponsive to his tender inquiries. Her thoughts were of another was his quick conclusion as he fled from her presence before the harsh accusations could break from his eyes.

In his den once more, with the door closed, he gave himself up completely to black thoughts. He recalled his words to her, uttered years ago, half in jest and half in earnest. He had horrified her beyond expression by telling her how he would punish a wife if he were the husband she deceived. With a grim, lurid smile he remembered the penalty. He had said he would not kill; he would disgrace the woman frightfully and permit her to live as a moral example to other wives. He now felt less brutal. He might kill, but he would not disgrace. For an hour he sat and wondered what had been the feelings of his old friend George Driscoll just before he deliberately slew his faithless wife. He remembered saying to other friends at the time that Driscoll had "done right."

This night of black shadows—he did not sleep at all—was really the beginning of the end. He forgot the presidency that was to be handed out to him. He forgot everything but the horrid canker that gnawed into his heart and brain.

Day and night he writhed in silent agony, a prey to the savage jealousy that grew and grew until it absorbed all other emotions. Scandal, divorce, dishonor, murder, swept before the mind of this man who had been of the people and who could not condone. The people kill.

For a week he waited and watched and suffered. What he knew of men told him that they do not devote themselves to the wives of others with honorable motives behind them. He convinced himself that he knew the world; he had seen so much of it. The man aged years in that single week of jealousy and suspense. His face went haggard; his eyes took on a strange gleam; his manner was that of a man in grave trouble.

Day after day this piteous, frenzied man who swayed thousands with his hand stooped to deal with the smallest movements of one man and one woman. Despite his most intense desire to drive himself into other and higher channels, he found himself skulking and spying and conniving with but one low end in view.

He employed every acute sense in the effort to justify his suspicions. Time and again he went home at unusual hours, fearing all the while that he might incur the pain of finding Bansemmer there. He even visited the man in his office, always rejoicing in the fact that he found him there at the time. He watched the mail in the morning; he planned to go out of nights and then hurried home deliberately, but unexpectedly. Through it all he said no word to Frances Cable or Jane. He asked no questions, but he was being beaten down by apprehensions all the while.

His wife's manner convinced him that all was not well with her. She avoided being alone with him, keeping close to her room. He detected a hundred pretexts by which she managed to escape his simplest advances.

At last, overwhelmed by the strain, he began to resort to cunning—this man who was big enough to have gone from the engine cab to the president's office. It required hours of struggle with his father, nobler nature to bring himself low enough to do trickery, but the fatal influence mastered. He despised himself for the trick, but he would know the truth.

The late afternoon mail one day brought to Mrs. Cable a brief letter, typewritten both inside and out. David Cable saw her open and read the missive, and he saw her trembling hand go to her throat and then to her temple. Her back was toward him. He could not see her face until she turned, a full minute later. Then it was calm and undisturbed, but her eyes were brilliant. He ground his teeth and tore upstairs without a word. David Cable had stooped low enough to write this letter, and he was paying for it.

He knew the contents far better than she knew them. The letter purported to be an urgent appeal from James Bansemmer, asking her to meet him at 8 o'clock that night. It said:

I must see you tonight. Leave your home at a quarter of eight for a short call on Mrs. W. Just around the corner. I will meet you across the Drive, near the sea wall. It is quite dark there.

David Cable did not know that en-

ter in the afternoon James Bansemmer had called her up by phone to say that he intended to speak to the son the following day unless word came to him from her, nor could he have possibly known that she was now determined to tell the whole story to her husband and to trust to his mercy. He only knew that he had written the letter and that he had told her of his intention to go downtown immediately after dinner.



CHAPTER XV.

HE dark, muffled figure of a man leaned against a section of the old wall that edged the lake—the figure of a man who prayed with all his soul that his vigil might be in vain. If she came, all was over.

He was not armed. He had thrown his revolver away a week before. His only desire now was to learn the extent of her duplicity. If she obeyed the call of the letter then there could be no doubt that she was coming at the call of the lover. His hands twitched, and he shivered as if with a dreadful chill. His heart was shouting a warning to her, but his head was urging her to come and have done with it all.

He was there early—long before the hour named in the decoy. His eyes never left the sidewalk that ran past his own house, but a short distance from the Drive. They stared without blinking across the dark border through the circle of light from the arc lamp and far into the shadows of blackness beyond. It was very dark where he stood. The lake had battered through the sea wall for many rods at this particular point, and no one ventured out beyond the bridge path for fear of slipping down into the cavities that had been washed out by the waves. His station was on the edge of the piles of stone and cement that had been tossed up to await the pleasure of the park commissioners.

For awhile he tried to take Jane's future into consideration, but it was impossible to substitute anything before his own wrongs. David Cable was not the kind of man who would go on living with a faithless wife for the sake of appearance. He was not an apologist. Time and circumstance and the power of true love would adjust the affair of Jane and Graydon Bansemmer. This was his affair. Time could not adjust it for him.

At last he saw a woman's figure hurrying down the street. The wild, eager hope that the light from the electric lamp would prove it to be other than that of his wife was quickly dispelled. His worst fears were true. His Frances, his wife of more than a score of years, his pretty sweetheart through all those days, was false to him! As he fell back against the wall something seemed to snap in his breast; a groan of misery arose to his lips.

With eyes which saw red with rage and anguish, he watched the hesitating approach of the woman. She stopped at the corner and looked up and down the Drive, peering intently into the dark shadows by the lake. The sky was overcast. No stars peeped through its blackness. With uncertain halting steps she crossed the boulevard, still glancing about as if in search of some one. He moved forward unconsciously, almost blindly, and she caught a glimpse of his tall, dark figure. He was not unlike Bansemmer in height and carriage. As she drew near, his legs trembled and tears of despair flooded his eyes.

A savage desire to grasp her by the throat and hurl her into the waters beyond the break came over him with irresistible power. Then came the pitiable collapse which conquered the murderous impulses and left him weak and broken for the moment. With a sob he turned and leaned upon the wall, his back to her, his face buried in his tense arms—crushed, despised, dishonored. Kill her! The horror of it swept his brain clear for an instant. Kill his pretty Frances? Kill Jane's mother? How could he think of it?

It was a long time before the wretched man knew that she was standing close behind him and was speaking to him. The sound of her voice came through the noise of his pounding heart as if it were far away and gentle. But what was it that she was saying? Her voice was angry, suppressed, condemning.

"You may take it or refuse it, just as you please," were the first words his turbulent senses distinguished. "I can pay no more than that for your silence. The other is impossible. I will not discuss it again with you." She paused as if waiting for him to respond.

"Tonight I shall tell my husband everything—the whole story. I cannot endure the suspense any longer. I will not live in fear of you another hour. My only reason for coming out here tonight is to plead with you to spare your son and Jane. I am not asking anything for myself. It would break Jane's heart if Graydon should refuse to marry her. You must have a heart somewhere in that!" But the words became jumbled in the ears of her listener. From time to time his mind grasped such sentences as these, par-

alyzing in their bitterness: "I have the letters of adoption. David will not believe what you say. He loves me, and he loves Jane. I am willing to pay all that I have to keep it from Graydon and Jane. But I intend to tell my husband. I will not deceive him any longer. He will understand, even though he should hate me for it. He will love Jane, although she is not his own child."

David Cable seemed frozen to the spot. His brain was clearing; he was grasping the full importance of every sentence that rushed from her impassioned lips. The last appalling words fell like the blow of a club in the hands of a powerful man. He was dazed, stunned, senseless. It seemed to him that his breath had ceased to come and that his whole body had turned to stone. His wide staring eyes saw nothing ahead of him.

"Well, what have you to say?" she was demanding. "Why have you asked me to come out here? You have my final answer. What have you to say? Are you going to tell Graydon that Jane is not our child? I must know."

"Not our child?" came from the palsied lips of David Cable, so low and lifeless that the sound was lost in the swish of the water below. The intermittent red signal in the lighthouse far out in the lake blinked back at him, but to him it was a steady, vivid glare.

"Do you hear me? I have lied to my husband for the last time!" There was almost a tone of victory in the voice now. "Do you hear me? You don't dare! David will not believe you. He will believe me!"

A terrible oath choked back the hopeful words in the woman's throat. Murder had come back into the man's heart.

"You lie!"

"David!"

"Yes, it's David! Liar! Whose child is she? Tell me!"

"David! David! For God's sake, hear me! There was no wrong, I swear it!"

"She's not my child and there's no wrong!" The sardonic laugh that followed was that of a raging maniac. "You've fooled me, you fiend! You devil!"

At that word and with one look at her husband's terribly distorted features, Frances Cable shrank back with a single terrified cry, turned from him and fled madly for her life. With the spring of the wild beast, Cable rushed



With the spring of the wild beast, Cable rushed after her.

after her, cursing her with every breath. In a few yards he had almost reached her, his hands outstretched to grasp her neck. But at that instant the frightened woman's strength suddenly gave way. Her knees received the fall of the limp body. For a second she seemed huddled in a posture of prayer, then toppled over, slipped easily forward through a fissure in the wall and plunged head foremost into the churning waters below.

In the lives even of the best men there are moments when the human instincts are annihilated and supplanted by those of the beast. Likewise have there been instances in which the bravest have been tried in the furnace and found wanting, while, conversely, the supposedly cowards have proved to be heroes. Therefore since no two situations can occur at a different time and yet have precisely similar conditions, it behooves us to forbear judging, lest we be judged, and to approach the following incident in this man's career as if we ourselves dwelt under a covering of glass.

From the time of his marriage up to this moment no man could have fought better the bitter struggle of life than David Cable, yet now in this hour—his hour of travail and temptation—he pitifully succumbed. Cowardice, the most despicable of all emotions, held him in his grasp.

He sank exhausted against the wall, his eyes fixed upon the black hole through which his wife had disappeared; then the stony glare changed suddenly to a look of realization—horrible, stupefying. He crept to the edge and peered intently into the water, not six feet below, his eyes starting from his head.

Black, sobbing water, darkness impenetrable! The instinctive fear of apprehension caused him to look in every direction for possible eyewitnesses. Every drop of blood in his body seemed turned to ice with horror. Down there in that black, chill water lay the body of his wife, the woman he had loved through all these trying years, and he her murderer!

Terrified, trembling, panting, he tried to force himself into the water with the vague hope of saving her, after all, but even as he looked wildly about for help, a shout ready to spring from his dry throat, the natural dread of the accused facing his accuser took possession of him. Fear, abject fear, held him in grasp; he could not shout.

A man was running across the Drive toward him—a long, loping figure that

covered the ground rapidly. With a last horrified look in the water, David Cable, craven for the moment, turned and fled through the night along the broken sea wall—died aimlessly, his eyes unseeing, his feet possessed of wings. He knew not whither he ran, only that he was an assassin fleeing from the horrors behind.

Over the narrow strip of ground sped the long, eager figure that had darted from the shadow of the homes across the street. In hoarse, raucous tones he shouted after the fleeing man: "Stop! Wait! Halt!"

He dashed up to the spot where he had seen two figures but a moment before, the full horror of what had happened striking him for the first time. The man was Elias Droom, and he had been an eyewitness to the dim, indistinct tragedy at the sea wall.

His presence is easily explained. He knew of Bansemmer's telephone message to Mrs. Cable, together with his threat to expose her on the following morning. It was only natural that she should make a final plea—that night, of course. The old clerk realized the danger of an encounter between his employer and his victim at a time so intense as this. He could not know that Bansemmer would visit the Cable home that evening, but he suspected that such would be the case. It was his duty to prevent the meeting, if possible.

Bansemmer would go too far, argued the old man; he must be stopped. That is why he lurked in the neighborhood to turn Bansemmer back before he could enter the home of David Cable.

He saw Mrs. Cable leave the house and go toward the lake. Following some distance behind, he saw her cross the Drive and make her way to the sea wall. Slinking along in the shadow of the buildings, cursing his luck and Bansemmer jointly, he saw the two forms come together out there by the lake.

"Too late, curse him for a fool," Droom had muttered to himself. "He ought to know this is bad business just now. She's come out to meet him too. Worse. It's my duty to look out for him as long as he employs me. I'm doing my best, and I can't help it if he betrays himself. I'd like to see him—but I can't go back on him while I'm taking money from him. Look at that!"

He chuckled softly as he saw the two figures approach each other. For all that he knew they might be contemplating a fond and loving embrace, and he was not unduly concerned until he saw one of the figures separate itself, run from the other and go plunging to the earth. As he started up in surprise the other figure leaped forward and then straightened itself quickly. Droom did not hesitate. He dashed across the street, conscious that something dreadful had happened. His instant thought was that Bansemmer had lost his temper and had struck the woman down.

The flight of the man was proof positive. He called him to stop, certain that it was Bansemmer. The runner turned his face toward him for a moment. The light from the street may have deceived Elias Droom's eyes, but the face of the assailant was not that of James Bansemmer. Droom stopped short and looked after the man, paralyzed with amazement. Then he gave a snorting laugh at his own stupidity. Of course it was Bansemmer. Who else could it be?

Arriving at the spot where he had last seen the couple, he was amazed to find no one there. He realized, with horror, that the woman must have been struck down, had fallen or had been thrown into the lake.

The gaunt old clerk groaned bitterly as he threw himself upon the wall and peered over into the water. He listened for the cries and struggles of the woman. Gradually his eyes solved the situation. He saw the row of spiles beyond the break in the sea wall and the swishing pool inside. Every incoming wave sent a flood of water between the sturdy posts and into the cut of the wall.

Without a moment's hesitation he dropped into this seething prison, confident that the woman's body could be found there. A single glance had shown him that he could crawl upward through the break to safety, and he knew that the water below was not dangerously deep.

A minute later he was scrambling out of this angry, icy water up through the fissure, bearing in his long arms the inert form of Frances Cable. He had found her half submerged in the pool, every sweep of the waves through the stielike posts covering her completely.

He dropped the body on the ground after reaching the level and took a quick, shuddering glance about. Two men had stopped on the opposite side of the Drive. He hesitated a second and then shouted to them. They stood stock still in alarm. Before they could respond to his second shout Elias Droom was tearing the woman's watch from her belt and the rings from her fingers. His strong, nervous hands found the necklace that she wore, and it broke beneath their sudden jerk. Cunningly he tossed the necklace upon the ground and trampled it with his heel. The watch and rings went flying across the wall and far out into the lake.

"This woman has been slugged!" he shouted. He did not know how much of the tragedy these men had witnessed. Boldness was his cue for the moment; stealth could follow later. "She's been in the water. I'm afraid it's murder. The man who did it went that way. Tell for the police!"

If the assailant was James Bansemmer, Droom was doing his duty by him; if it was another, he was doing his duty by society.

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